

## FROM KHANA TO LAQÊ : THE END OF SYRO-MESOPOTAMIA\*

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As a culture-historical construct, the term “Mesopotamia” is generally viewed as subsuming the civilizations that made use of Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian as their primary languages. As a geo-historical construct, the same term is used to refer to the North-central component of the previous concept, with a meaning similar to that of the modern Arabic term “Jezira”. Etymology can help us only part way : the suggested notion of “land-between-the-rivers” is skewed in an easterly direction in the culture-historical acceptance (since it stops at Mari on the Euphrates, and it includes to the East the major tributaries of the Tigris), and it is skewed in a Northerly direction in its geo-political acceptance (since it includes only the region between the two Zab’s and the Khabur). While terminology is not important in and of itself, it has a significant impact as a short

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\* It is with much admiration that I am offering these reflections to a scholar who came to serve on different occasions as a standard of reference for my own studies, whether it was Kupper 1957; 1961 during my work on the Amorites or, later, KUPPER, 1947; 1950; 1964; 1972, during my work at Terqa. The larger research, of which this article is a part, builds broadly on his own pioneering work. Some of the points raised here were first presented during a paper I read at the University of Arizona in 1986. In its present form, this is the last in a series of six articles currently in press or in preparation which deal with the history and geography of ancient Khana. The sequence of articles is as follows :

- (1) “Salt at the Dawn of History : The Case of the Bevelled Rim Bowls” (to appear in a volume edited by M. VAN LOON, P. MATTHIAE and H. WEISS);
- (2) “‘River Bank’, ‘High Country’, and ‘Pasture Land’ : The Growth of Nomadism on the Middle Euphrates and the Khabur” (to appear in a volume edited by M. WÄFLER);
- (3) “The Rural Landscape of the ancient Zor : The Terqa Evidence” (to appear in B. GEYER (ed.), *Les techniques et les pratiques hydro-agricoles traditionnelles en domaine irrigué*, Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique, Damascus);
- (4) “The Kingdom and Period of Khana”, *BASOR* 270 (1988), p. 43-61;
- (5) “The People of Terqa and Their Names” (in preparation);
- (6) “From Khana to Laqê : The End of Syro-Mesopotamia” (published here).

The current version of this article is rather programmatic in nature. I plan to eventually integrate it, as well as the other articles of the series, into a full-size monograph and at that time I will include a fuller documentation and argumentation than is possible here. I will also include there proper cartographic and photographic illustrations of the geographical phenomena described.

circuit to concepts. It may not really matter whether “something” is called Mesopotamia or Assyro-Babylonia; but it matters if we tacitly and unwittingly attribute a specific conceptual configuration to that particular “something” by virtue of a particular connotation which we perceive to be present in the term and which we then transfer to the “something”. The “signified” (i. e. the “something”) may end up being determined by the preconceived connotation attributed to the “signifier” (the “term”), rather than the other way around, as well it should be.

The term “Syro-Mesopotamia” has come recently to be used in common scholarly parlance, perhaps reflecting, more than anything else, a renewed perception of the importance that Syria has for an understanding of Mesopotamian culture. While it posed little problem to subsume Mari under Mesopotamia (albeit considering it just an “outpost”, rather than a central point, of Mesopotamian civilization), it feels a bit more awkward to consider “Ebla” as Mesopotamian *tout court*. A term like Syro-Mesopotamia obviates such an uneasy feeling. But if defined only in this sense, in function of intuitive scholarly perceptions rather than of specific historical constructs, the term will not be particularly useful as a real signifier. When, back in 1977, this term appeared as part of the title of the new journal *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies*, a sub-unit of the system *Monographic Journals of the Near East*, it was as a result of considerations which focused very consciously and explicitly on the “signified”<sup>1</sup>. Under the term “Syro-Mesopotamia” I view both the culture-historical *and* the geo-historical constructs fused in one. Culturally, I understand Syro-Mesopotamia as the urban civilization characterized most visibly by the use of a unified cuneiform scribal tradition, which implies a commonality of written languages and underlying scribal training, as well as a commonality in the social texture serving as a presupposition for the use of scribal services. Geographically, I understand Syro-Mesopotamia as the combination of three macro-environments<sup>2</sup> which are represented schematically in the map on Fig. 1

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1 The programmatic statement given in the first issue of the journal (BUCCELLATI and KELLY-BUCCELLATI, 1977a) suggested some initial considerations on the meaning of the term. - I would like to record here, with gratitude, a memorable conversation held in 1976 in Damascus with Marilyn KELLY-BUCCELLATI, who became the editor of *SMS*, and with Kassem TOUER, who became a member of the editorial board, during which Kassem TOUER first proposed the title which we eventually adopted for the journal.

2 For the relative significance of macro- vs. micro-environments see MARFOE, 1979, esp. p. 1-3, 10. I plan to develop to a fuller extent the study of the geographical factor in an eventual revision of the Khana articles of which the present one is a part, and to focus on some pertinent micro-environmental zones for more detailed documentation. An

- the arid, but irrigable alluvial plain in the South-East; the arid steppeland, non-irrigable except for the river oasis of the Middle Euphrates and lower Khabur; and the rainfed, rolling hills in the North and North-West.

A study of the collapse, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century B.C., of Syro-Mesopotamia as a unified cultural world will help to clarify, first, what might have been the nature of this cultural entity while it lasted. Second, it will allow us to better understand the full impact which resulted from the realignment that followed. Finally, the specific role of Khana in this process will make us aware of how much more distinctive this region was than is generally understood, while illuminating its very critical and central role in the historical development of ancient Southwestern Asia <sup>3</sup>.

The historical transformations associated with Khana were momentous, not only in terms of territorial considerations, but also in terms of broader cultural issues : in particular, the industrial type of pastoralism, which had originated (in my understanding) with the rural classes of the Middle Euphrates, took on completely new characteristics following the demise of the urban state which had set this development in motion in the first place. The political vacuum left by the collapse of Khana was filled not by the tribal group of Laqê (which happened to inherit only the geographical habitat, not the political role, of Khana), but rather by the kingdom of Amurru, which expanded its territorial assertiveness from the central steppe towards the Mediterranean. The cultural echo of this unique sequence of events I see reflected in the patriarchal tradition, which may be viewed as the ideological manifesto of this great socio-political upheaval. The removal of the Middle Euphrates (embodied politically by the kingdom of Khana) from the socio-political scene of the Near East, coincided with, and was to some extent the cause of, the profound fissure between the two new cultural worlds - Mesopotamia in the East and Syria in the West - which had emerged in their specific new identity out of what had originally been the unified urban horizon of Syro-Mesopotamia.

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important recent study on the Khabur region is ERGENZINGER *et al.*, 1988. Of major importance for any future study on Syrian geography will be the *Dictionnaire géographique de la Syrie* which is currently in the planning stages under the sponsorship of the *Société Géographique Syrienne*, see BOUNNI, 1988.

3 The first article in the series referred to above in the note appended to the title pointed to the exploitation of salt resources as the initial reason why the Middle Euphrates came to be within the direct sphere of interest of urban "Mesopotamian" civilization; and the second article gave an interpretation of the rise of pastoralism as part of the process whereby Khana became a central player on this urban stage.

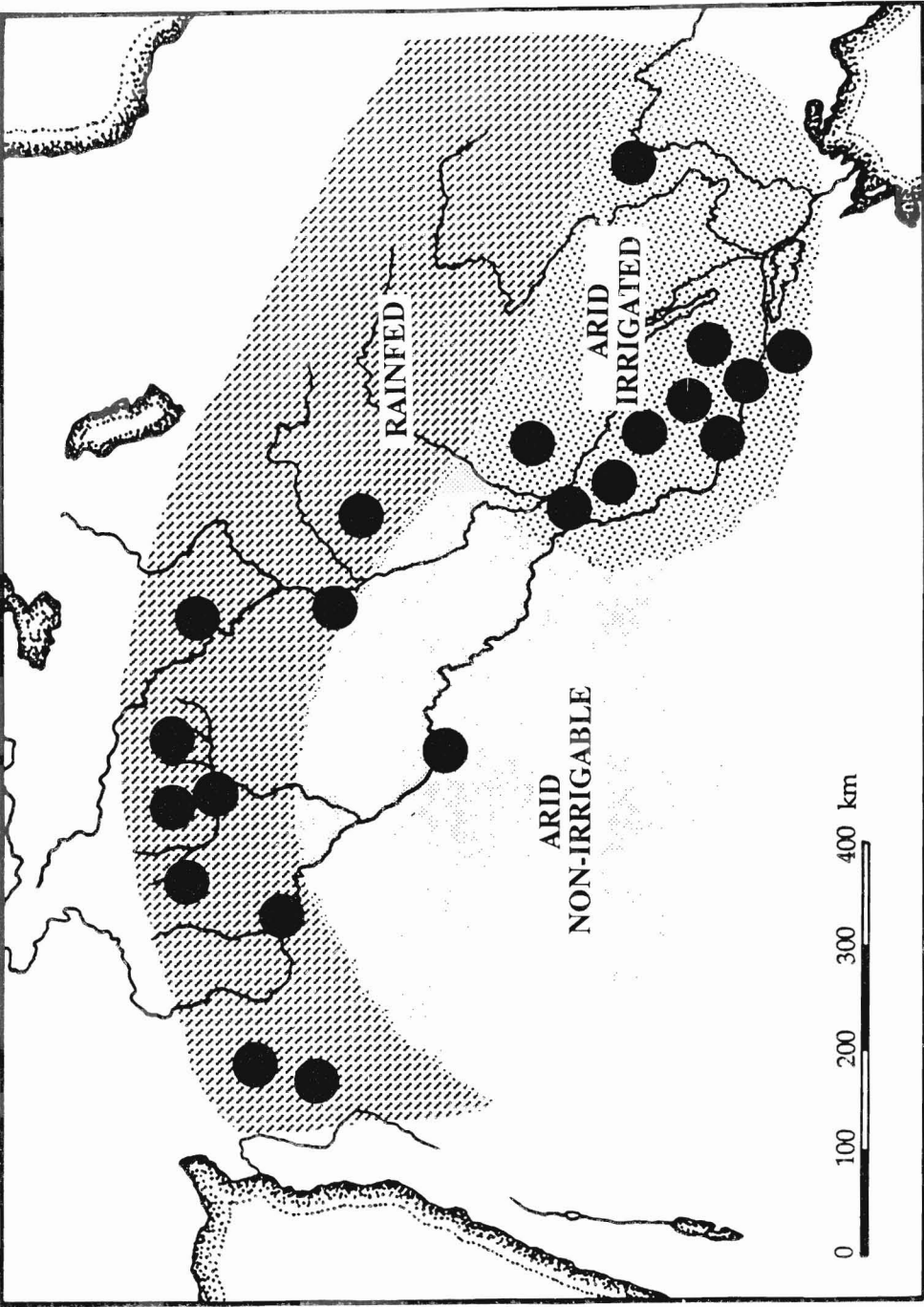


Fig. 1 : Schematic climatological map of Syro-Mesopotamia  
(The black dots stand for major urban centers).



## 1. The new regionalization

Mesopotamian political history is characterized by a sustained trend towards an ever widening integration of the territorial base and a growth in complexity of institutional structures. The thrust of this expansionist process would predictably have derived from a number of considerations - political (widening of the power base), economic (access to, and direct exploitation of, more resources), military (presumption of easier defense within larger boundaries). National or ethnic factors appear instead to have been in the background, and ideology (religious ideology in particular) followed suit by providing an appropriate conceptual frame. Important for the Mesopotamian context, on the other hand, were administrative considerations : the scribal bureaucracy provided an excellent tool for capillary control of any system, no matter what its size, and as such it certainly would have been exploited to its fullest and most pervasive extent as a tool of government.

The logic of this process led eventually to the establishment of a universal state under the Assyrian empire. Along the way, there were several attempts at establishing a pan-Mesopotamian state, notably under the dynasties of Akkad and Ur III, and then briefly under Hammurapi, but these may be considered as isolated, if very significant, episodes, since they did not result in lasting, territorial integration. The inescapable imperative towards territorial growth may instead be seen to have passed through a number of very gradual phases of which the following are the most important.

1) The early *city-states* were based on a single urban settlement and controlled only their rural hinterland.

2) Inter-urban warfare led to the inclusion of several urban centers under the sphere of influence of an emerging central city, resulting in a political entity which I have called *expanded territorial states* <sup>4</sup>.

3) Geographical factors contributed to the further development of expanded territorial states, resulting in the formation of *regional states* with a certain degree of geographical integration (e. g. Larsa in the lower alluvium; Eshnunna in the Diyala basin; Ashur in the Zab basin).

4) The fourth phase in this development is the one which concerns us most here. It got underway by the middle of the second millennium, and resulted in a permanent realignment of spheres of influence and in the establishment of two major geo-political zones : Kassite Babylonia in the South, and Mitanni, then Assyria, in the North. These may perhaps best be defined as *macro-regional*

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4 BUCCELLATI, 1967, p. 69-72.

*states*<sup>5</sup> : on the one hand they exhibited a certain degree of geographical uniformity, with Mitanni and Assyria corresponding to the dry-farming area along the northern piedmont ranges, and Babylonia corresponding to the arid, but irrigable, plains of the central and southern alluvium; yet they were wider in scope than the regional states in that they subsumed a much larger variety of types of landscape. These two macro-regions had exhibited since early times a considerable distinctiveness in terms of material culture (especially ceramic assemblages and architectural traditions). It is further conceivable that the northern macro-region had already developed, prior to 1500 B.C., a geopolitical integration of its own with such diverse cities as Urkish, Mari and Shubat-Enlil serving at different times as the political capitals. The southern macro-region, on the other hand, seems to have in fact come into existence only after 1500 B.C.

Unlike the early pan-Mesopotamian episodes, this new regionalization was to prove an irreversible phenomenon. On the one hand, the separation between the two macro-regions continued unabated even after the establishment of the Assyrian empire - which is why the latter is more truly to be regarded as a universal than as a pan-Mesopotamian state. On the other hand, there was no more reversion, in either of these two macro-regions, to the small scale states known from phases (1) through (3).

A fundamental concomitant of this new regionalization was the total split of the Western area, i. e. Syria, from the two Mesopotamian macro-regions. That this Western area could not be considered at this time a macro-region was due to the lack of internal political integration over the whole area and to the strong incidence of foreign suzerainty. This split of Syria from the two eastern macro-regions was also an irreversible phenomenon, which entailed, as I will describe at length below, the effective end of Syro-Mesopotamia.

The overall picture which emerges from this new regionalization may aptly be described under the label of "cosmopolitan age", which refers to "a whole

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5 In the case of kingdoms such as Khana, or Amurru (for which see later), it may appear as though the term "macroregion" corresponds to what Rowton calls a "dimorphic state." The main difference is that the term "macro-region" refers to features of the landscape, rather than of social and political organization, and as such it offers a wider typology. But in addition, I do not consider the concept of dimorphic state to be distinctively applicable to a case like Khana : as I argued especially in article 3 of those listed in the note appended to the title, I do not read the evidence as validating the concept of an originally nomadic component which would have been in symbiotic relation to the sedentary government; rather, I interpret the situation as referring to a rural population on its way to becoming increasingly autonomous from the central government. In this respect, any state would be dimorphic since each one has an important rural component.

world of nations ... struggling for internal unity after the model of the city”<sup>6</sup>. The political boundaries of the macro-regional states came to coalesce with the outward limits of given cultural wholes, and as a result a truly inter-national community developed. The earlier city-states or expanded territorial states of Syro-Mesopotamia shared a common cultural base with each other (beginning with the language), so that the degree of inter-nationalism among them was more political than cultural. The macro-regional states of the cosmopolitan age, on the other hand, were much more diverse vis-à-vis each other, culturally as well as politically : the difference in language was the most noticeable differentiating trait, since only Assyria and Babylonia spoke mutually understandable dialects of the same language. This resulted in the establishment of a *lingua franca* (Akkadian) for diplomatic exchange, a tell-tale sign of the degree of consciousness which characterized this new internationalism. Another outward indication for the existence of such international awareness was the development of what might properly be called the first full-fledged system of international law.

One aspect of this system which is of special interest to the present argument pertains to clauses found in international treaties which dealt with a class of displaced or stateless persons known from the texts as ‘*apirû* or *munabîtu*’<sup>7</sup>. What is significant is both the very existence of such a class, and the fact that its existence was institutionalized through a complex set of regulations. While the earlier Syro-Mesopotamian world would also have known individuals who were socially uprooted and politically displaced, it was only in the cosmopolitan age that they came to constitute a class by themselves : a reason for it may be found in the fact that their presence was more noticeable in a setting where their different cultural background would more clearly set them apart from the society within which they had taken up residence. Their ability to achieve a certain degree of internal cohesiveness within individual bands or small groups was favoured by their having access to a fringe area, such as the steppe, which was not territorially under the full-fledged control of the macro-regional state organisms. This process, in turn, added to the opportunity they had of coalescing as a veritable social class. An important component of the broad international picture of the cosmopolitan age was the recognition of this territorial and social fringe, and the determination to deal firmly with it. The territorial fringe was the non-urban residuum, such as the steppe; the social fringe was a fluid social class which tended to slide uncontrolled through the interstices of

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6 BUCCELLATI, 1977, p. 147, with reference to McNEILL, 1963, p. 110-66.

7 See ROWTON, 1976; BUCCELLATI, 1977; MILLARD, 1980.

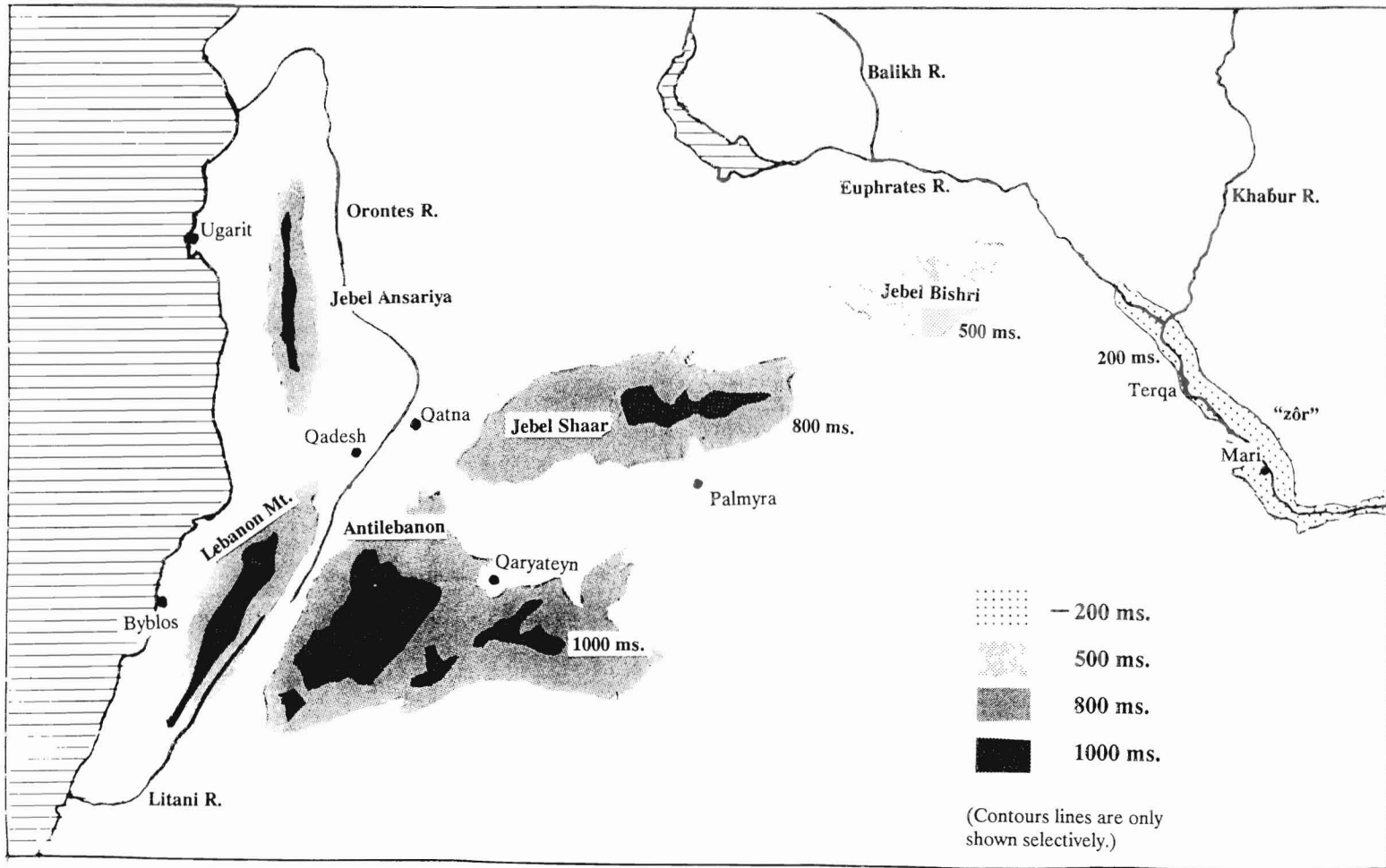


Fig. 2 : Physical geography of the steppe and adjacent river valleys (schematic map).

centralized governmental institutions. The determination to control the fringe was manifested in two ways. (1) Control of the social dimension was obtained through the attribution of an internationally well defined legal status to what came to be recognized as a specific social class. (2) Control of the territorial dimension was obtained through the growing integration of non-urban areas (primarily the steppe) under the direct political control of urban-based state structures (such as the kingdom of Amurru, as we shall see).

## 2. The Middle Euphrates and the end of Khana

The abandonment of Terqa and the collapse of Khana on the Middle Euphrates are at variance with the picture I have just painted : instead of progressive integration, here we have a rare instance of regression in what is otherwise a trend towards greater urbanization throughout ancient Southwestern Asia. This is all the more striking since in earlier periods Khana had displayed unparalleled leadership in precisely the same direction that was later pursued everywhere else in the Near East. Let us review briefly how this early process unfolded along the Middle Euphrates, whereby the earliest experimentation in the social and cultural integration of the steppe resulted in the eventual complete demise of its urban core, just at the time when the reverse process was getting started elsewhere.

The kingdom of Khana, first under Mari and then, for a shorter period of time, under Terqa, had played a major role on the stage of Mesopotamian history during the third and early second millennia. Because of a series of factors, largely environmental in character, this kingdom had in fact emerged as the first macro-regional state in the sense described above : Khana included such diverse landscapes as the narrow river oases of the Middle Euphrates and of the lower Khabur, the salt playas of Bouara (and possibly of Palmyra as well), the rangeland of the steppe, and for certain periods of time the rolling plains of the Khabur triangle (Figs. 2 and 3) <sup>8</sup>. In terms of size as well, if not in terms of urban density, Khana was similar to the later macro-regional states of Mitanni/Assyria and of Babylonia : at no time during the third and early second millennia was control over the macro-region of Khana split among two or more states; rather, the major part of this area remained at all times under the political control of a single urban center (see the schematic map on Fig. 1).

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8 See the second and (for the salt playas) the first of the articles mentioned in the note appended to the title.

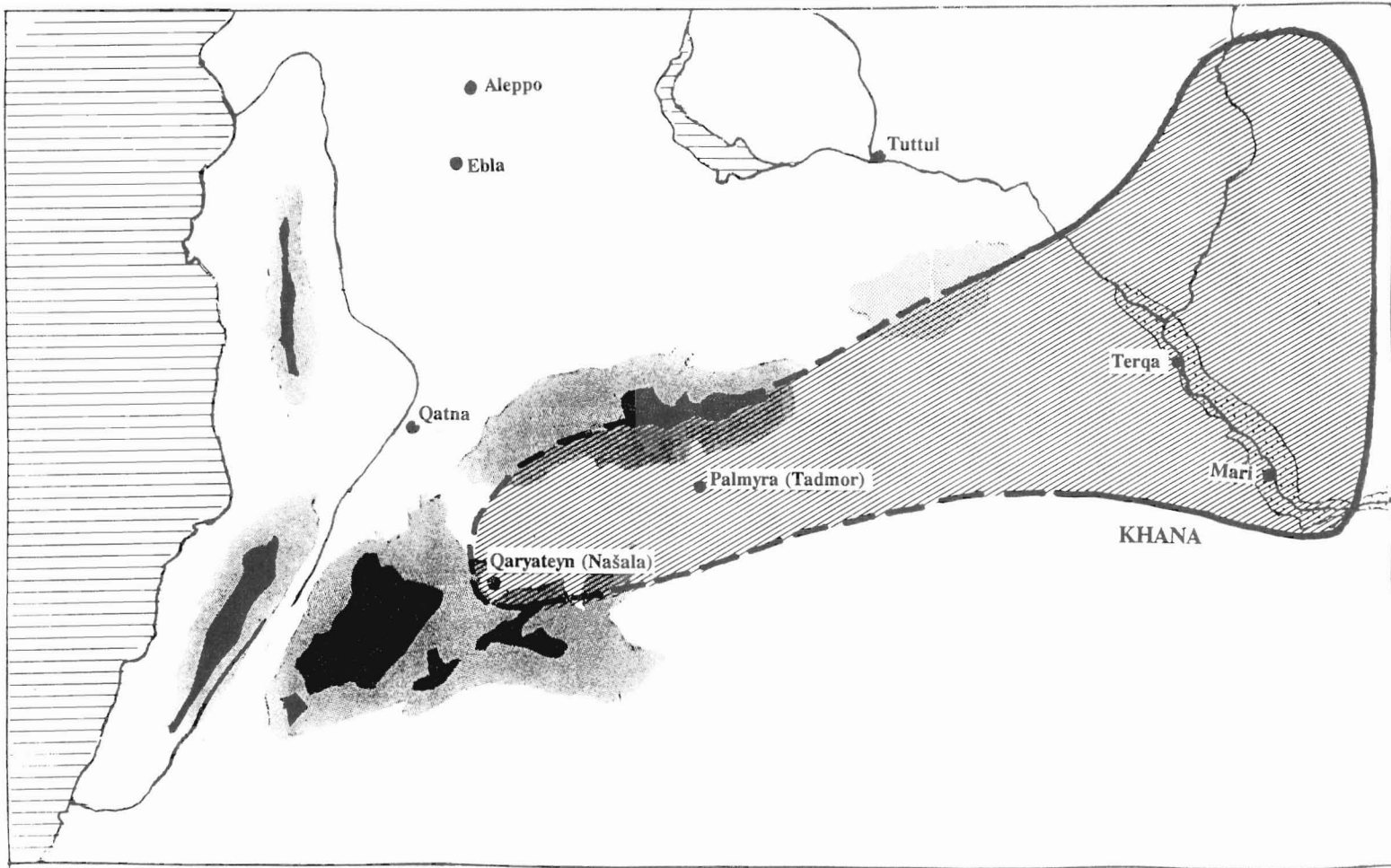


Fig. 3 : Khana as a macro-regional state (under Terqa).

While we know that the end of Mari was brought about by the outside intervention of Babylon under Hammurapi, we have no direct information about the factors which caused the end of Terqa. It may have coincided with the Hittite raid of 1595, at which time Mursilis I marched through this region on his way to Babylon : certainly if Terqa was still settled at the time, it does not seem that it posed any threat for the advancing Hittite army <sup>9</sup>. At any rate, it is clear from the archaeological record that Terqa did not survive as an urban center past the 16<sup>th</sup> century : all indications are that the city was effectively abandoned, serving only as a tribal point of reference for special occasions (e. g. as a ceremonial site for burials and occasional political encounters with the Assyrian army) <sup>10</sup>. It also seems certain that Terqa was a much smaller city than Mari <sup>11</sup>, implying that a certain decline had already begun to take place even while it was serving as capital of the kingdom. Since we have no evidence for a single major destruction which might have terminated the life of Terqa as an urban settlement, we may assume a progressive and slow demise, resulting eventually in complete abandonment.

But more important than the abandonment of Terqa was the total disappearance of the very kingdom of Khana after the 16<sup>th</sup> century. By this I mean not so much the end of a given dynastic line or political tradition, but rather the complete reversion of what had been the macro-region of Khana to a political and urban vacuum. No major active urban center is known on the entire length of the Middle Euphrates from Emar all the way to Babylon. The Assyrians show relatively little interest in the Middle Euphrates because it has lost its urban configuration, and remained essentially non-urban until the time when Dura-Europos emerges as a caravan station on the way to Palmyra. The resulting void stretched for an enormous distance along the Euphrates, some 600 kms. as the crow flies. The situation had almost reverted to what it had been at the dawn of urban expansion, at which time no major urban settlements were to be found on the Euphrates from Habuba to Uruk <sup>12</sup>. The sheer territorial dimensions of this phenomenon are staggering. Nor can they be understood on a purely local level. We would be missing an all important dimension in the general history of ancient

9 For possible evidence of Hittite presence in Terqa see KELLY-BUCCELLATI and MOUNT WILLIAMS, 1977, p. 6 f.

10 See BUCCELLATI and KELLY-BUCCELLATI, 1977b, p. 8; BUCCELLATI, 1979, p. 29-30; and article 3 in the note appended to the title.

11 See article 3 in the note appended to the title. Some limited core soundings carried out in 1987 just outside the perimeter of the tell seem to confirm that there is no trace of an urban settlement in Terqa outside the city walls.

12 For the special case of Qraya and Ramadi see the first article quoted in the note appended to the title.



Southwestern Asia were we simply to assume that the growth of Khana had been a mere local episode and that its demise did not signal a broader impact.

To some extent, the disappearance of Khana as a macro-region in its own right was the result of the broader geo-political realignment which had seen the establishment of the northern and the southern macro-regions. Although neither Mitanni/Assyria nor Kassite Babylonia bothered to pay much attention to the Middle Euphrates, it was as though they had managed to effectively eliminate any breathing space there, any possibility for the continuation of an autonomous state like Khana. The introduction of the new name "Laqê" seems to underscore the change that had intervened. In one of the few instances of reversion from an urban to a non-urban mode of life, the "house" of Laqê replaces the "country" of Khana; the name of Terqa survives in its new form "Sirqa/u"<sup>13</sup>, although it is by now, as already mentioned, the name of a ceremonial gathering place rather than that of an urban settlement.

### 3. Amurru as the "successor" of Khana ?

The collapse of the Middle Euphrates urban world, signaled by the loss of the geo-political term Khana and its replacement by the tribal term Laqê, provided a new orientation for the rural classes that had developed "industrial pastoralism" from their urban base in the *zôr* (the river oasis of the Middle Euphrates). Since the North-South regionalization in Mesopotamia left no room for an urban Middle Euphrates, its rural classes receded in the direction that was left open to them, i. e. towards an area that the new Mesopotamian macro-regions did not include under their sphere of influence - the western steppe, towards Palmyra and Qatna. It is significant that the texts of Mari<sup>14</sup> speak of Mari pastoralists being in contact with the pastoralists of Palmyra and Qaryateyn all the way to Qatna : this implies that there was no intermediate territorial entity between Mari and Qatna, so that these two kingdoms were in a sense bordering with each other across the full space of the steppe, some 400 kms. as the crow flies. Since the text suggests that the pastoralists of Mari were in close proximity to Qatna, rather than the other way around, the implication is that the central part of the steppe was under the control of Mari. After the fall of Terqa this was

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13 The writing *Sir-qa-KI* is already found in the Old Babylonian text published by STEPHENS, 1937, 2.

14 *ARM* V, 23 speaks of Suteans who go on a raid against Tadmor and Nashala (i. e. Palmyra and Qaryateyn) and then against Qatna. In *ARM* V, 15 Ishkhi-Addu of Qatna invites Yasmaḥ-Addu of Mari to have his herds graze in the pastureland of Qatna.

unclaimed territory, and so it would have been a suitable haven for the rural classes of Khana, who had grown accustomed to its terrain.

That the name of the new geo-political organism should not have continued that of Khana is not surprising : “Khana” was not an ethnic appellation which might have remained associated with the rural classes, but a political title which would have lost its identity once the underlying territorial integrity had been dismantled, and the ruling class had disappeared. On the other hand, the term “Amurru” was sufficiently generic and sufficiently tradition-bound to be used for a new organism which exhibited several institutional peculiarities vis-à-vis the other Syrian kingdoms of the Amarna period. And “Amurru” had already been in use in the Mari period to refer to a geographical area which may well be seen to correspond to the southwestern portion of the steppe : one letter refers to “the messengers of 4 kings of Amurru” who are to be entrusted to the messenger of the king of Qatna <sup>15</sup>; and another speaks of “the country of Yamhad, the country of Qatna and the country of Amurru” <sup>16</sup>, suggesting a geographical sequence from North to South, to the East of the Orontes. Amurru is clearly not a kingdom like Qatna, however : there is no “king of Amurru” in the time of Mari, but rather local rulers (“kings” in the plural) situated possibly in the broad band of steppe which corresponds to the Qaryateyn/Palmyra corridor (ancient Nashala and Tadmor respectively), between the mountain ranges of the Jebel Shaar and the Jebel Tadmori Jenubi (Fig. 2). It is quite possible that the “kings of Amurru” of whom speaks the letter just quoted might have been a group comprising, let us say, the local ruler of a tribal group centered around Nashala, the local ruler of a group centered around Tadmor, and so on, not sufficiently important to be identified as kings of individually named distinct kingdoms, but sufficiently autonomous to be viewed as a group of intraregional chieftains.

From a territorial point of view the transfer of Amurru to the Hittite sphere of influence after the battle of Qadesh acquires a special new light in view of the hypothesis advanced here. If my understanding of the territorial base of Amurru is correct, then it will be seen to correspond to the entire southern border of the Hittite area, from the coast to the steppe (see map on Fig. 4); as such, it would have served as a major buffer on two counts. First, and more obviously, it corresponded to the full length of the major international border between Egyptian and Hittite areas : as such it followed the natural relief defined by the northern reaches of the Lebanon and the lower mountain ranges north of it. The second way in which Amurru would have served as a buffer was as an

15 A.2760, DOSSIN, 1957, p. 37 f.; KLENGEL, 1965-70, vol. 2, 182.

16 A.2730 33, DOSSIN, 1957, p. 37 f.; KLENGEL, 1965-70, vol. 2, 182.

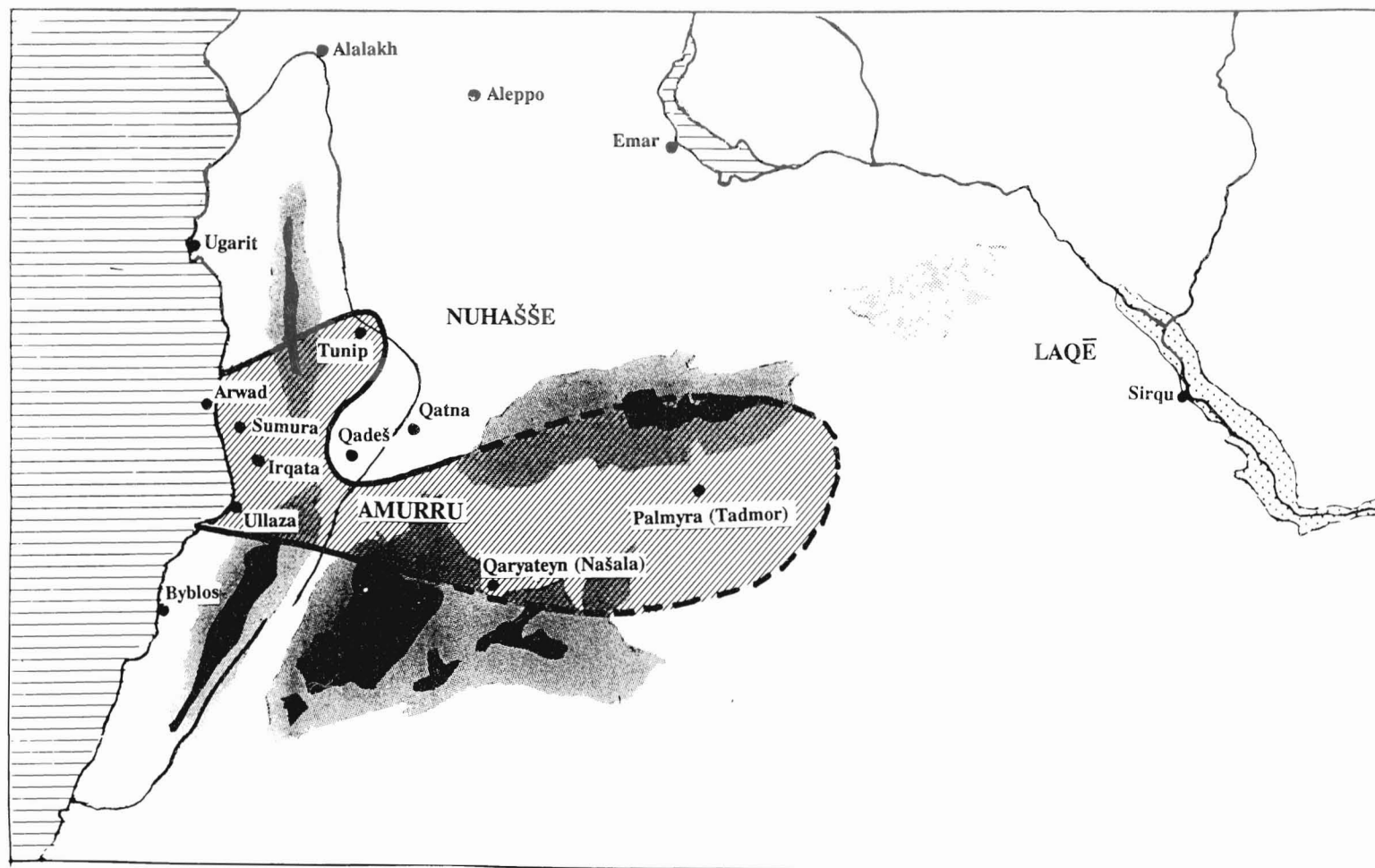


Fig. 4 : Amurru as a macro-regional state.

institutional barrier to influxes from the steppe. It was precisely the nature of Amurru as a kingdom derived from a steppe chiefdom that would have made it, once absorbed within the texture of a fully politicized state system, the best bullwark against those Hapiru's which the kings of Amurru knew so well. Such a broad geo-political scope would seem to account much better for the rise of Amurru to political prominence than if it were based only along the coastal strip : the marriage of Benteshina of Amurru in the Hittite royal family implies a geo-political significance for this kingdom greater than that of its neighbors. In point of fact, if the situation was as I suggest it, Amurru would have served for the Hittites the same role as a buffer towards southern Syria that Karkemish served towards the Trans-Euphratian region. The unique significance of Amurru is underscored in Rib-Addi's letters where he poses the (rhetorical) question as to whether Abdi-Ashirta, "the dog, the slave", or his sons, could possibly be compared to the kings of Hatti, Mitanni and Babylon <sup>17</sup>. No matter how rhetorical such a question may have been, it must have had some degree of verisimilitude for it to have been repeated like a cliché, and without presumed offence, to Pharaoh. Amurru had achieved, by all indications, the status of a macro-regional power, though, unlike the other kingdoms of similar nature, its springboard to power seems to have been pastoralist, rather than urban, in nature.

The two major institutional peculiarities of the kingdom of Amurru <sup>18</sup> are that its first known ruler, Abdi-Ashirta, does not bear the royal title, and that there are no known cities within its boundaries before the conquests along the central Mediterranean coast (at which time we find cities like Tunip, Sumura and Irqata) <sup>19</sup>. The assumption under which I am working, namely that Amurru began in the steppeland of the low mountain ranges between Palmyra and Qatna/Qadesh, and then expanded to the Mediterranean in the area between the Lebanon and Jebel Ansariya, would account well for both facts. We may reason that if Abdi-Ashirta was the ruler of a non-urban, but important inland region he would have had a stronger power base for achieving a major prominence than if he came from the immediate and very narrow hinterland of cities like Sumura, Irqata or Tunip. It is significant that even after the conquest of the urban enclaves

17 EA 76,12 f.; 104, 17 f.; 116,67 f.; see already BUCCELLATI, 1967, p. 71.

18 See already BUCCELLATI, 1967, p. 69-71.

19 I first called attention to these facts in BUCCELLATI, 1967, p. 69-72, where similar arguments are adduced for an evaluation of the kingdom of Lab'ayu. The concept was further developed by LIVERANI, 1979, p. 15, and was taken up by various others scholars, among whom see, most recently, AHLSTRÖM, 1986, p. 24, n. 51; p. 37; 40; p. 66, n.38.

along the coast, the kings of Amurru did not change their titulary to reflect the urban component : this would suggest to me that the original component reflected in the name "Amurru" was not only ideologically, but politically as well, of major significance. And the insistent association of both Abdi-Ashirta and Aziru with the Hapiru's would also fit well with the setting in the steppe <sup>20</sup>. It should also be noted that the use of a name other than a city-name to refer to the kingdom of Amurru would correspond well to the appellation of Nuhašše, which might be considered, institutionally, as the northern equivalent of Amurru - since Nuhašše too is not identified with any particular city and since we have references to the "kings" of Nuhašše, in the plural.

It is in this sense that I see in the rise of the kingdom of Amurru the continuation of a process that had begun with the destruction of Mari : we might say, if somewhat loosely, that just as Terqa had replaced Mari, so the kingdom of Amurru replaced Terqa. A kingdom originating with a rural component in the steppe and expanding west to include an urban enclave, Amurru is like a mirror image of Khana - which was an originally urban kingdom which expanded west to make of the steppe its broader rural base. And structurally there is a similarity in the role that Khana first and then Amurru played on the international scene : they served as the major institutional interface between the urban world and the steppe.

Yet it must be stressed that my argument is only inferential and speculative : there is no direct evidence for such a process, nor could any conceivably be adduced. I am not in fact suggesting that the link between the Khana of Mari/Terqa and the kingdom of Amurru was one of direct historical continuity, such as might be represented by the transfer of specific power structures (a dynastic line, for example), or the survival of specific institutional bonds (a tribal migration, for example). Rather, I am only using indirect evidence, starting from the simple observation of two concomitant transformations : shortly after the time of the collapse of Terqa and of the corresponding urban state of Khana, centered on the Middle Euphrates, we see the rise of a new political organism which, I propose, originated in what had been previously the Western periphery of the same Khana kingdom.

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20 A careful study of the texts written in Western Akkadian and originating from Amurru might also provide some indications about possible dialectal peculiarities of inland Syria. I plan to come back to this issue in the fifth of the articles quoted above in the note appended to the title. For a study of the "dialect" of Amurru see HAYES, 1984 and IZRE'EL, 1985 (of the latter I have only seen the abstract).

The lack of archaeological evidence from the steppe must be mentioned. In the survey we conducted in 1966 in the region of the Palmyrene <sup>21</sup>, and which extended as far to the Southwest as Qaryateyn and as far Northeast as the central ridges of the Jebel Bishri, we found no evidence of occupation from the second millennium B.C., even though some potential clues had been reported for Palmyra. If both Khana and Amurru pastoralists were present in the regions of Palmyra and Qaryateyn, should we not expect a trace of their activities ? That we do not find any, may be more easily explained for the period of Khana, when presumably the pastoralists were essentially based in the river valley, and used the steppe only as a rangeland for seasonal interludes. But if Amurru was originally based in the steppe, and from there expanded to the urban region of the coast, we would indeed expect a different situation. It is of course possible that a closer look at the terrain might yield different results, especially perhaps in the area of Qaryateyn itself, which we covered only to a limited extent and which has not otherwise been adequately surveyed; but it is also possible that the nature of the settlements was indeed poor, and not apt to leave any particularly identifiable trace in the archeological record.

Another qualification which ought to be introduced pertains to chronology. If we place the collapse of Terqa at about the time of the Hittite raid on Babylon (1595 B.C.), and the reign of Abdi-Ashirta at about 1400 B.C., the time span for the entire evolutionary process would have been of about two centuries. And the phase attested in the letters of Amarna would reflect the culmination of this process, when full political consolidation had been obtained in the form of a tribally based chiefdom (under Abdi-Ashirta) and we see the final transformation to a major territorially expanded city-state (under Aziru). This may at first seem too long a time frame for this kind of process, but it will instead appear as reasonable if one considers that no urban center had been established in the Khana period in the steppe proper, nor, from all indications, was any such new center established there during this time. In other words, the process as envisaged here was not one whereby a pre-existing urban state was infiltrated and taken over by gradual assimilation (as was the case with the "Amorite" diffusion in the early part of the second millennium); it was rather a process whereby the rural classes retained, and enhanced, their social cohesion without the specific and univocal point of reference of any given urban center. This was accomplished in the relative isolation of the central steppe, from where they emerged eventually gravitating to the opposite pole of the urban landscape - the

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21 BUCCELLATI and KELLY-BUCCELLATI, 1967.



coastal ranges of the Mediterranean rather than the piedmont and alluvial plains of the Euphrates and the Tigris.

#### 4. The cultural impact of the rural classes

The set of circumstances which had initially contributed to the development of industrial pastoralism in Khana resulted in the establishment of a totally unique type of rural class in the ancient Near East : the industrial agropastoralists of the *zôr* <sup>22</sup>. *Politically*, they had developed a strong power base vis-à-vis the urban state because they alone had real control over the vast terrain of the steppe, where the military arm of the state could hardly reach. *Economically*, they had achieved considerable autonomy, since they alone knew how to tap the resources of the steppe - the rangeland which could be utilized for herd pasture once water became available through the digging of wells; while full scale, or “industrial”, pastoralism is ultimately aimed at an urban market, it can be expected to provide long term sustenance for its practitioners without any direct interaction with their urban counterpart. *Socially*, the special living conditions of the pastoralists in the steppe, and their conscious juxtaposition to the city people, had fostered a unique sense of solidarity (local and temporal), which may be described as tribal. *Linguistically*, the dialectal peculiarities of this powerful rural class were preserved more readily than with other rural classes of the ancient Near East, precisely because of their unique socio-political status; Amorite in particular, may be viewed, I propose, as old rural Semitic next to the old urban Semitic known as Old Akkadian and Eblaite <sup>23</sup>.

Another aspect of the “pastoralist revolution” to which I wish to call attention here is the *ideological* dimension. The dramatic growth to power by the pastoralists was unique in that it was both the cause and the effect of a profound transformation, through which a new environmental zone, the steppe, had become a permanent part of the growing landscape of civilized life. Such a momentous cultural experience was likely to make an impact on the accompanying folk tradition. And an echo of such “lore” may be found, I suggest, in the patriarchal and the conquest traditions of the Bible.

To begin with the former. In my understanding of the process of the “nomadization” of the rural classes of the *zôr*, the pastoralists moved in search of

22 For a description of this process see especially the second article in the series mentioned above in the note appended to the title.

23 I intend to discuss more fully this newly proposed linguistic typology of early Semitic in the fifth article listed in the note appended to the title.



pasture lands for their flocks toward two major and distinct targets : the higher ground of the steppe (which they essentially took over), and other cultivated areas, i. e. the rainfed plains in the north and the irrigated alluvium in the south (where they interacted with preexisting urban centers and their rural hinterlands). In the process, they came to travel over long distances, though not exactly in a nomadic mode because they retained for the most part a close identification with their original rural and, we might say, para-urban <sup>24</sup> base. When they found themselves, for whatever reason, in a position of contrast with the central urban government from which they technically depended, it was easy for them to gain some distance from that government, to oppose it actively from their newly found position of strength, or alternatively to switch allegiance to other governments, with which they were in fact already in regular contact. The figure of Abraham would seem to fit this mold <sup>25</sup>. As depicted in Genesis, his rejection of the city is made possible by the degree of independence he enjoys, and which does not link him to any given urban state. His father's initial rejection of Ur, and then his own rejection of Harran, may be viewed, as Albright had already suggested, as indicative of the geographical range within which the scene unfolds; similarly, the setting of Jacob's travels <sup>26</sup> may broadly point to the Palmyra/Qaryateyn locale which I have postulated as a possible initial core for Amurru.

The strong religious ramifications of the process as envisaged here were partly responsible for the transmission of this folk tradition : since, as I presume, it was originally rural in character, the normal mechanisms of urban "scribalcy"

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24 With this term I refer to the close interaction that the pastoralists retained with the specific urban centers of which their original rural base formed the hinterland. Thus while the pastoralists do not belong to the urban classes as such, they gravitate around very specific urban centers to which they originally, and ultimately, belong.

25 I will come back in a later version of this study to a discussion of the similarities, and differences, between my reconstruction and that of other scholars, from ALBRIGHT and MENDENHALL to FINKELSTEIN and COOTE and WHITELAM, who have dealt from a similar perspective with the issues discussed here.

26 The geographical perception of the Genesis story shows Jacob setting out in the direction of Paddan-Aram (28:2.5.10), and then stopping by a well (29:2) in the "land of the sons of the East" (29:1) : there he meets Laban and his shepherds who are said to have come "from Harran" (29:4). The story implies a change of scene to the north when, at the end of Jacob's marital adventures, he is shown to be in Paddan-Aram (31:18) and having to cross "the River" (i. e., the Euphrates, 31:21) on his way back south. The "land of the sons of the East" is reminiscent of the "land of the East" where the sons of Abraham's concubines are otherwise said to have gone (25:6). Such a general orientation East-Northeast of Palestine in the direction of the Balikh would broadly correspond to the Palmyra/Qaryateyn corridor.

were not available to insure the type of cultural permanence with which we are otherwise familiar. But the pastoralist "revolution" was indeed likely to bring about a new approach to religious categories as well. I presume the rural countryside to have become rather thoroughly urbanized in its religious outlook; in other words, I presume that the rural hinterland was essentially "para-urban" in a religious respect as well, and that the temple institutions of the cities served the rural population as well as the urban elite. As for the agro-pastoralists, while they started, presumably, from the same "para-urban" background, they may well have developed at variance with the urban tradition, precisely in the measure in which they found reason to distance themselves from their rural, or "para-urban", origins. Whatever view one may hold about the early phase of Biblical monotheism <sup>27</sup>, the following considerations would appear to be uncontroversial - that a monotheistic perception of the divine developed in the ancient Near East *subsequent* to a polytheistic one, and that we have no indications of it having evolved from a rationalizing or philosophizing approach. The general setting of early pastoralism would seem to be indeed a fitting historical locus for such a major cultural development : the perception of the divine as projected in the early strands of the Israelite tradition can best be understood, in terms of the cultural modalities which conditioned it, against the socio-cultural adaptation of the early pastoralists <sup>28</sup>.

One further comment on the patriarchal tradition pertains to the question of its dating. I cannot go along with recent attempts <sup>29</sup> to date this tradition to the late first millennium, partly because I find the arguments proposed quite unconvincing (though I cannot give here my counter-arguments), but also because the general thrust of the reasoning seems to miss the forest for the trees. As it stands, the patriarchal tradition is rather unflattering as a story of national origins, nor can its built-in humbleness be attributed to an express ideological bias of later times. An invented scribal legend of origins from the first millennium, whether royal or priestly, would be more likely to betray a search

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27 I am quite aware of both the difficulty of attributing monotheism *tout court* to the patriarchal tradition, and the nuances which ought to be used to describe mono- vs. polytheism, but for the purposes of the argumentation in its present form I will use by choice a certain amount of oversimplification.

28 I cannot go here into the details of this question, which I hope to take up at a later date as part of contrastive structural study of Mesopotamian and ancient Israelite religion. See for now my article "Mesopotamian Magic as the Mythology and Ritual of Fate", to appear in S. DENNING-BOLLE, (ed.), *The Persistence of Religion*.

29 Notably VAN SETERS, 1975; see also GARBINI, 1988. For a different position see the various contributions in MILLARD and WISEMAN, 1983, especially the interesting paper by MILLARD.

for a more glorious ancestry. With a royal class that reached for full urban sophistication, and with a priestly class that cherished the monumentality of the temple, why would anyone turn for an ideological manifesto to the pastoralist world which, yes, was still very contemporary, but in fact too contemporary for comfort? If the patriarchal tradition is indeed an ideological manifesto, it could not be better suited but for the epic transformation which had brought about pastoralism in the first place. Just as the epic of Gilgamesh may be viewed as a manifesto of the Sumerian urban expansion towards unknown, non-urban lands, so the patriarchal tradition may be viewed as the natural efflorescence of a socio-cultural transformation which on all counts could not but be perceived as glorious, epic and - memorable.

In another respect too the process which I have hypothesized here may possibly be linked with the Biblical tradition, and this pertains to the "Conquest"<sup>30</sup>. The sequence of events I have proposed for Amurru, whereby the pastoralists of an inland region make their way over the coastal ranges to the Mediterranean follows a pattern similar to the one known in broad outline from the Bible for the early tribes of Israel. While obviously the chronological period and the geographical horizon are different, the overall similarity of the pattern deserves to be pointed out. Without pursuing this to any length, I may for instance call attention to the general direction of the movement, to the initial lack of identification with any of the cities conquered, to the institutional transformation from tribal chieftain to king<sup>31</sup>. What may be significant in all this is the general modality which seems to shed light on common patterns of socio- and geo-political transformations, and may provide some degree of explanation by reference to the perceived antecedents of such a process.

## 5. The end of Syro-Mesopotamia

The abandonment of Terqa and the collapse of Khana were not, as I have already stressed, a mere local event. As I see them, there were profound concomitant transformations which affected the Near East as a whole and which

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30 I will not deal here with the question of the peasants and their role in this process. For a useful review of current approaches see the contributions to FREEDMAN and GRAF, 1983. Article 5 in my Khana series (quoted in the note appended to the title above) deals in some detail with the problems of land tenure and the role of the peasant in ancient Syria.

31 See also AHLSTRÖM, 1986, p. 24, n. 51. In my terminology, AHLSTRÖM's thesis could be described by saying that the political process under Saul resulted in the establishment of Israel as a macro-regional state (see especially ch. 4).

make us reflect on the overall course of the political and social history of ancient Southwestern Asia. If the center of gravity of all *political* development in the ancient Near East had clearly been the city, then we cannot ignore what a unique setting the Middle Euphrates had proved to be : under Mari, and to a lesser extent under Terqa, the rural hinterland controlled by the metropolitan center was disproportionately larger than that of any other Mesopotamian kingdom; and after Terqa, the reversion to a non-urban status affected this same region for a period of almost a full millennium. As for the *social* dimension, the development of the rural class into an industrial type of pastoralism was such that its fortunes could follow quite a different path from that of established urbanism. Unsited for urban development, the rangeland of the steppe was for the same reason impervious to direct urban controls. Mari (and presumably Terqa) had established only a limited and indirect control, and this by encouraging the expansion of their own rural class towards the new frontier. A measure of autonomy derived, inescapably, which lent the farmers turned pastoralists an unpredictable resilience.

Against this background we may better appreciate why the end of Khana signaled a more profound transformation than one would think. From being a disproportionately large territorial state, the whole middle Euphrates region reverted to a non-urban status. Khana was not replaced by any other urban based political entity, either indigenous or foreign. Not only did the Syro-Mesopotamian urban world lose thereby a very sizeable component of its complex inter-state structural ensemble; it also lost the effectiveness of urban-type controls on a major route, the Euphrates, which had been previously essential for the viability of the Syro-Mesopotamian world as a whole. Thus it is that the end of Khana proved to be at the same time the end of Syro-Mesopotamia.

The new Syria which emerged was a vastly different world. The contribution of Khana was not only in providing (negatively, through its own irreversible collapse) the initial momentum for differentiation by virtue of the chasm which had opened up in the fabric of the Syro-Mesopotamian political world. There was also a positive contribution in that, as I see it, Khana had created a pastoralist class through the intermediary of which an organized state had, for the first time, brought a measure of systematic control to the steppe - a pastoralist class which retained its physiognomy and autonomy once the central state control vanished. Their strong rural ideology provided the cultural humus for the origins of one of the most influential religious movements ever, if indeed we can trace to this period and area the roots of a monotheistic perception of the divine. On another front, their essential urban (or para-urban) background led

them to the establishment of a new macro-regional state, whose king was to carry one of the most high-sounding titles of the new Syrian political world, that of "king of Amurru".

The end of Syro-Mesopotamia and the definition of a new Syrian cultural horizon are sufficient reasons for considering the middle of the second millennium a fundamental historical juncture, more significant in some respects than even the transition from the Bronze to the Iron age at the end of the millennium.

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# De la Babylonie à la Syrie, en passant par Mari

Mélanges offerts à Monsieur J.-R. Kupper  
à l'occasion de son 70<sup>e</sup> anniversaire



Textes réunis par Ö. Tunca

Liège 1990

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Photographie : Monsieur et Madame Kupper en visite à Mari le 4 octobre 1989.

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## AVANT-PROPOS

La parution de ces *Mélanges* coïncide avec le 70<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de Monsieur le Professeur J.-R. Kupper. Nous avons choisi ce moment symbolique pour rendre hommage au savant assyriologue dont les travaux font autorité depuis plus de 40 ans. Tous ses amis qui ont participé à ce volume, mais aussi beaucoup d'autres qui n'ont pas pu le faire, souhaitent à Monsieur J.-R. Kupper de poursuivre longtemps sa fructueuse vie assyriologique.

Le nom de Monsieur J.-R. Kupper reste bien entendu attaché en premier lieu à la civilisation de Mari. Mais ses amis n'ont pas oublié que la Babylonie et la Syrie sont aussi ses terres de prédilection et ils en ont largement tenu compte dans leur contribution. Le plan des *Mélanges* suit ainsi un itinéraire qui n'était pas inhabituel dans l'Antiquité.

Pendant la réalisation de l'ouvrage, nous avons appris, avec consternation, le décès de Monsieur E. Sollberger qui a été le premier à répondre à l'appel et à rendre hommage à Monsieur J.-R. Kupper.

En dehors des auteurs, de nombreuses personnes m'ont apporté une aide précieuse dans la réalisation de ces *Mélanges*. Je remercie en particulier mes collègues R. Laffineur qui a mis à ma disposition l'installation informatique de son service à l'Université de Liège et D. Charpin qui m'a fourni généreusement la fonte Cuneilaser qu'il avait élaborée. La saisie du texte sur ordinateur a été effectuée par Mmes Inès De Sousa-Remacle et Chantal Sarto-Pirlet. C'est à la compétence de Madame Michèle Arnold que je dois la présentation graphique du volume.

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Ö. T.

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